DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 435 156 EC 307 488

AUTHOR	Cantrell, Mary Lynn; Cantrell, Robert P.; Valore, Thomas G.; Jones, James M.; Fecser, Frank A.
TITLE	A Revisitation of the Ecological Perspectives on Emotional/Behavioral Disorders: Underlying Assumptions and Implications for Education and Treatment. From the Third CCBD Mini-Library Series, What Works for Children and Youth with E/DB: Linking Yesterday and Today with Tomorrow.
INSTITUTION	Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders.
ISBN	ISBN-0-86586-347-4
PUB DATE	1999-00-00
NOTE	59p.; For other monographs in this series, see EC 307 486-492.
AVAILABLE FROM	The Council for Exceptional Children, 1920 Association Dr., Reston, VA 20191 (stock no. D5324: $11.40, CEC members $8).; Tel: 888-232-7733 (Toll Free); Fax: 703-264-9494; Web site: <http://www.Internet-service@cec.sped.org>.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom (055) -- Information Analyses (070)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Behavior Disorders; *Educational Environment; Elementary Secondary Education; *Emotional Disturbances; Intervention; Severe Disabilities; *Special Education; *Teaching Models
IDENTIFIERS	*Ecological Model (Special Education); *Project Re Ed (Hobbs)

ABSTRACT

This monograph is a guide to the ecological perspective on the education of children and youth with serious emotional and behavioral problems. An introduction explains that the ecological view defines emotional disturbance not as something existing in the child, but rather as the expression of discord in the ongoing transactions between a child and others in his or her unique world. Individual chapters address the following topics: (1) emergence of the ecological perspective; (2) basic premises of the Re-ED philosophy as developed by Nicholas Hobbs; (3) three major characteristics of ecological interventions (values-based decision making, an open paradigm with a pragmatic bent, and a shared competence model); (4) implications for education and treatment of troubled and troubling children and youth; (5) incorporating elements of other perspectives into an ecological approach (such as psychoeducational techniques, behavioral strategies, and social skills/problem-solving curricula; (6) useful templates to clarify the Re-ED perspective; and (7) contributions to current thought and future possibilities. (Contains 41 references.) (DB)

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A Revisitation of the Ecological Perspectives on Emotional/Behavioral Disorders

Underlying Assumptions and Implications for Education and Treatment

Mary Lynn Cantrell
Robert P. Cantrell
Thomas G. Valore
James M. Jones
Frank A. Fecser

EC 307 488

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Lyndal M. Bullock & Robert A. Gable, *Series Editors*

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The Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders, *Publisher*

About the Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders

Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders

CCBD is an international and professional organization committed to promoting and facilitating the education and general welfare of children and youth with behavioral and emotional disorders. CCBD, whose members include educators, parents, mental health personnel, and a variety of other professionals, actively pursues quality educational services and program alternatives for persons with behavioral disorders, advocates for the needs of such children and youth, emphasizes research and professional growth as vehicles for better understanding behavioral disorders, and provides professional support for persons who are involved with and serve children and youth with behavioral disorders.

In advocating for the professionals in the field of behavioral disorders, CCBD (a division of The Council for Exceptional Children) endorses the Standards for Professional Practice and Code of Ethics adopted by the Delegate Assembly of The Council for Exceptional Children in 1983.

Stock No. D5324, ISBN 0-86586-347-4

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Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Foreword

Public education is in transition. Pressure is mounting to establish and maintain safe and effective schools—schools that produce positive educational outcomes for all students. Recent federal legislation has prompted the redefinition of roles and responsibilities of many school personnel, especially those working with students who have disabilities or are at risk. In serving students labeled "seriously emotionally disturbed," "behaviorally disordered," or "emotionally/behaviorally disordered," we face new challenges to promoting positive approaches to discipline and instruction within and across educational settings.

In the midst of these uncertain times, we would do well to reflect on our history, revisit the theoretical underpinnings of our profession, and renew our commitment to finding ways to better serve students with emotional and behavioral disorders. That is the focus of the Third Mini-Library Series produced by the Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders (CCBD). Along with an exploration of historical and contemporary issues within our profession, this monograph series highlights the critical issues of safe schools, school-wide discipline, and positive behavioral supports. The following seven volumes that comprise the series are derived from the 1999 international conference sponsored by CCBD:

- *Developing Positive Behavioral Support for Students with Challenging Behaviors* by George Sugai and Timothy J. Lewis.
- *Educating Students with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders: Historical Perspective and Future Directions* by Richard J. Whelan and James M. Kauffman.

- *Historical Chronology of the Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders: 1964–1999* by Lyndal M. Bullock and Anthony L. "Tony" Menendez.
- *Perspective on Emotional/Behavioral Disorders: Assumptions and Their Implications for Education and Treatment* by C. Michael Nelson, Terrance M. Scott, and Lewis Polsgrove.
- *Psychoeducation: An Idea Whose Time Has Come* by Mary M. Wood, Larry K. Brendtro, Frank A. Fecser, and Polly Nichols.
- *A Revisitation of the Ecological Perspectives on Emotional/Behavioral Disorders: Underlying Assumptions and Implications for Education and Treatment* by Mary Lynn Cantrell, Robert P. Cantrell, Thomas G. Valore, James M. Jones, and Frank A. Fecser.
- *Safe Schools: School-Wide Discipline Practices* by Timothy J. Lewis and George Sugai.

As in previous monographs, we have drawn upon the expertise of CCBD members to assemble information that addresses the needs of professionals responsible for the education and treatment of students at risk and those who have emotional and behavioral disorders. We are grateful for their outstanding contributions to our field.

Lyndal M. Bullock
University of North Texas

Robert A. Gable
Old Dominion University

Introduction

Nicholas Hobbs once said wryly that the term *ecology* had been "polluted by the environmentalists." As a major developer of the ecological approach to serving children and youth with serious emotional and behavioral problems, Hobbs's humor had special meaning. Ecological concepts have proved important to the education and treatment of troubled and troubling children and youth—important for (a) intervention planning for individual children and policy issues and (b) system planning for groups of these individuals.

The ecological perspective does not see severe emotional disturbance as something existing in the child. Rather, the ecological view defines emotional disturbance as the expression of discord in the ongoing transactions between a child and others in his or her unique world. In this approach, the child is an inextricable part of a small social system composed of the child and all the people who interact with the child. The child defines this ecosystem, acting on it as well as being impacted by it. The "serious emotional disturbance" label is born when one or more ecosystem members can no longer tolerate the discord in the system and seek help that results in the child's formal identification. Intervention's task is "helping the significant members of the ecosystem, including the child or adolescent, take the steps necessary to enable the system to work reasonably well—that is, within tolerable levels of discord" (Hobbs, 1982, p. 183). Awareness of and emphasis on strengths in the ecosystem are critical components for accomplishing changes.

In this monograph we explore the following topics: (a) the emergence of the ecological approach, (b) basic premises of this perspec-

tive, (c) three major characteristics of the approach, (d) implications for education and treatment, (e) the perspective's change over time, incorporating components from other theoretical approaches, (f) some templates useful in analysis and intervention planning, including a youth's story, and (g) contributions to the field and future possibilities.

1

Emergence of the Ecological Perspective

According to Hobbs (1982), ecology is "the study of complex interaction of energies in natural systems" (p. 189). Although the term originated in the biological sciences, the concepts of natural ecology have been useful to professions serving troubled and troubling children and youth. Ecological concepts center around the interdependent nature of organisms—dependence both on each other and on their natural surroundings. These concepts clearly show the dynamic nature of a healthy balance, assuming that health for members of a particular ecosystem reflects a relative harmony occurring over time. At an ecosystem's best, the balance continually regenerates as the ecosystem's members function. At its worst, the introduction of a new and potentially toxic element, or the degenerative functioning of some member, can throw the ecosystem out of balance and threaten all its members. We believe that the parallels with human social ecologies are self-evident.

William Rhodes (1967, 1971, 1972) led the conceptualizers of Project Re-ED (Re-education of Emotionally Disturbed children) in developing the ecological approach during the late 1950s and early 1960s. As Rhodes described their early thinking,

> We felt that "disturbance" was a relative term, that different settings saw different kinds of behavior as "disturbed" depending on the cultural values and expectations of that setting, as

> well as the particular predilections of the child's own parents and teachers. . . . We felt that, to avoid the negative influence of institutions, treatment had to be in a setting as nearly like the child's natural habitat as possible. . . . [W]e felt we had to go into the child's own environment and alter it in just noticeable ways, so that, matched with the just noticeable changes in his or her behavior . . . we could bring about greater tolerance in the environment which was being disturbed by particular aspects of the child's behavior. (Hobbs, 1982, pp. 183–184)

Early proponents of an ecological perspective borrowed the term *ecology* because of its important additions to the concept of environment. The concept of mutual exchanges between members of an ecosystem provided a critical distinction.

Hobbs saw the natural affiliation between ecological concepts and competence building. He recommended choosing "the model provided by education—with its emphasis on health rather than illness, on teaching rather than on treatment, on learning rather than on fundamental personality reorganization, on the present and the future rather than on the past, on the operation of the total social system of which the child is a part rather than on intrapsychic processes exclusively" (Hobbs, 1982, p. 16).

The real-life laboratory for the development of interventions based on an ecological perspective was Project Re-ED. In 1962, while Hobbs was at George Peabody College, Nashville, Tennessee, the National Institutes of Mental Health provided funds to develop two short-term residential schools where these ideas would be translated into operations and tested. The interventions for children and youth served were not yet specified, but the pathways to discovery, adaptation, and creation of strategies were clear. The philosophy guiding the first two Re-ED schools (and Re-ED schools and programs since) was based on simple but highly affirmative beliefs:

> [T]hat young people have a tremendous desire to learn and to do well; that their feelings are intrinsically valid and quite as important as their thinking; that destructive and self-defeating behavior must be faced; that young people can help each other sort things out and arrive at good choices; that the world is rich in things to learn; that life is to be savored at each moment; and

> that decent, caring adults are absolutely essential in the lives of children if those children are to grow up strong in body, quick of mind, generous in spirit. (Hobbs, 1982, p. 20)

Operationalizing this philosophy from the ecological perspective—making it real every day—remains the task of Re-ED schools and programs. Although developed in mental health and special education service programs, these concepts and strategies were applied in public school settings (Cantrell & Cantrell, 1976).

2 Basic Premises of the Re-ED Philosophy

The premises of any approach to treatment guide the analysis of situations and the design and implementation of interventions. Beliefs underlying the ecological perspective are summarized in the following list. Implications for intervention are discussed further in subsequent chapters.

- Children's problems do not reside inside the child, nor do they reside solely in others.
- Each child functions in a unique world (i.e., ecosystem or "ecology" specific to him or her). The child is an inseparable member of that small social system made up of the child, family, school, neighborhood, and other community units where he or she spends time. (The ecosystem may even include some people and places where the child spends a great deal of mental energy, if not time.)
- When discord exists in the ecology, it occurs in the interactions of the child and members of his or her world.
- The child and the elements of that world share in both the problems and their solutions.
- The child and family are partners with professionals in planning and in accomplishing solutions. Each maintains responsibility for participation in their mutual growth.

- Education and treatment efforts occur in settings as close to the child's home and home school settings as possible.
- Careful assessment and analysis before planning an intervention is important to effecting change.
- What occurs (and how it occurs) during assessment and analysis sets the tone for collaboration in intervention. Intervenors foster collaboration when they are facilitators, committed to problem solving and not to assigning blame.
- The strengths of the child and of the people in his or her ecology are an important focus for analysis and intervention. Areas of need or problems offer targets for change. Strengths become critical elements of support for bringing about those changes.
- Discovery and choice of interventions involve identifying key logs in the logjam of difficulties. Pragmatic goals and practical interventions foster small, early successes that help everyone to maintain their efforts.
- Small changes in multiple locations can have large effects on overall functioning.
- Building competence in everyone involved produces lasting change.
- Successful living, experienced one day at a time, is therapeutic. Ideally, therapeutic, skill-building events and interactions are an integrated part of the day's ongoing activities.

3

Three Major Characteristics of Ecological Interventions

Characteristic 1: Values-Based Decision Making

Rather than providing a series of specified intervention techniques, the development of ecological interventions in Re-ED settings was guided by 12 principles (Hobbs, 1982, pp. 22–23). The 12 principles are summarized under three basic belief statements below.

I. We are emotional beings who need each other.
TRUST is essential . . . .
FEELINGS should be nurtured . . . .
GROUPS are major sources of instruction . . . .
COMMUNITIES' benefits must be experienced . . . .

II. Growth can be enhanced.
INTELLIGENCE can be taught . . . .
COMPETENCE makes a difference . . . .
SELF CONTROL can be learned . . . .
PHYSICAL experiences help us define ourselves . . . .

III. Today can be used to build health.
NOW is when life is to be lived . . . .
TIME is an ally . . . .
CEREMONY gives stability . . . .
JOY should be built into each day . . . . (Cantrell, in press).

Strong guiding concepts provide a basis for decision making when strategies and techniques fail, as they inevitably do sometimes. If this shared philosophy undergirds how helpers view both problems and solutions, then those responsible for treatment are able to generate new strategies more easily.

Characteristic 2: An Open Paradigm with a Pragmatic Bent

The ecological approach implemented in Re-ED programs has always been seen as "becoming," rather than being viewed as a fixed model. Hobbs frequently said that Re-ED reinvents itself every day. By that, Hobbs implied that there was no orthodoxy that specified exactly what the day should be like or what intervention should be designed for any child or family (Hobbs, 1982). The end result is a treatment approach that has endured the test of time, as fresh today as it was decades ago.

Practitioners of the ecological paradigm search continually for theoretical components and intervention strategies to fill the gaps in our field, adapting and creating new strategies where none exist. They expect to incorporate new and related knowledge, particularly where the available literature provides supportive data. In Re-ED's development, there was an explicit refusal to limit the knowledge search to any one discipline or field since none is sufficient to answer the questions relevant to helping troubled and troubling children and youth. Hobbs (1982) felt that the future for our children will depend on how well we "can draw nourishment from consultants who are aware of the continuing flow of new ideas from education, from biology and medicine, from the behavioral and social sciences, and from the humanities. . . . [We] must continue to be responsive to new learnings about human development, education, and mental health" (p. 130).

This open paradigm to helping troubled and troubling children and youth was unusual during the 1960s through the 1980s, when pro-

ponents of most treatment approaches were actively denying the potential contributions of others. In contrast, the ecological model provided a shell through which other concepts and models could flow, much like seawater flows through the baleens of a whale. Elements selected as nutrients were easily assimilated as part of the approach's repertoire; others simply flowed through untouched.

Characteristic 3: A Shared Competence Model

The ecological approach that led to the development of re-education strategies has been called a *competence model.* Gaining competence is a paramount goal for everyone substantially involved in the ecosystem. The critical nature of competence building is based on several beliefs and some supportive research.

Which comes first, behavior problems or skill deficits? Don't we need to deal with the behavior before we can teach?

Academic and functional skill deficits appear to both create and exacerbate behaviors that make children troubled and/or troubling. Both Feuerstein's work and Weinstein's research support that view. Feuerstein (1979, 1980) worked in Israel for three decades with children and youth whose lives had been damaged by war in many parts of the world. Many of these youngsters had cognitive delays, and some were seriously disturbed. After assessing their learning potential and using a formal instructional program to teach basic thinking and problem-solving skills, Feuerstein often observed a radical transformation in the children's adjustment.

Weinstein (1974) evaluated the impact of Re-ED schools by comparing progress on multiple variables by three groups: (a) 120 Re-ED male students; (b) 120 matched controls described as "disturbed or disturbing" by their teachers, who were receiving whatever services public schools could manage; and (c) 120 matched boys without school problems. Academic gains proved crucial to the general progress made by Re-ED students. Further, boys in the matched

control group who were not in Re-ED schools generally overcame their emotional problems when they also made progress in academic achievement, given whatever help was available where they were.

Emotional behavior varies as a function of the discrepancy between skill demands imposed on the individual and the individual's ability to meet those demands. Situational demands that far exceed skills (or expect extended repetition of skills long since mastered) foster increased rates of nonproductive, emotional behavior (Bricker, 1967; Cantrell & Cantrell, 1995). We believe this reaction is as true of adults as it is of children. Adults who react abusively to children may be expressing frustration at their own lack of ability to handle the child's behavior in other ways, or at their own inability to meet demands made on them in other settings.

What about our children's freedom? Do we have the right to intervene, to expect them to change their behavior?

Teacher-counselors often say, "Your rights end where someone else's begin." But there is a larger view. An individual's freedom is the size of his or her world and competencies, limited by the number and variety of settings in which the person is able to succeed. Since successful living is the ultimate goal for troubled and troubling children and their families, we must help them to expand their horizons, gain hope that they can create better lives for themselves, and learn to choose and succeed with more satisfying goals.

What about motivation? What can keep both the child and the helpers going?

Motivation to persevere results from setting clear goals and recognizing when small successes toward these goals occur. Enhancing the skills of family, community members, and staff serving the child and family can change an ecosystem in trouble to one in relative harmony. We try to make positive changes more visible and keep them in front of all the ecosystem members. We work to develop problem-solving skills and to acquire operational knowledge of many intervention options. "The achievement of competence, step by step, in matters small then large, is an attractive challenge not only to children and adolescents but to teacher-counselors as well" (Hobbs, 1982, p. 87). Life demands continual learning. Learning

what we need to know to meet demands is rewarding, but success is dependent on good instructional strategies and on step-by-step planning to achieve progress in treatment across time. In all, the ecological perspective provides practitioners with a values-based framework from which we are able to develop and refine educational and therapeutic experiences for building competencies in the child and other ecosystem members.

4

Implications for Education and Treatment of Troubled and Troubling Children and Youth

The philosophy that gave rise to the various strategies that have been developed in the ecological approach also produced a series of biases about intervention with children and youth. In what follows, we describe these biases and their implications for education and treatment.

Language is important; use the least damaging and most affirming language you can.

Words carry excess meaning; our word choices have consequences. Often, a term carries with it assumptions on which people will base decisions and then act. When the term applies to a human being, we are obligated to consider whether the assumptions implied by the term and the consequent actions are in the best interests of the person involved. For example official designations that one is "mentally ill" or "delinquent" lead to interventions by social agencies that exist to serve the ill or correct the delinquent, whether or not these

agencies actually meet the critical needs of that individual. Paradoxically, an agency may serve only to further instill the problems it was originally designed to solve (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 1990; Hobbs, 1982). To avoid implying that a child's difficulties were largely intrapsychic, Hobbs (1982) chose to describe children with severe emotional and behavioral disorders as "troubled and troubling." Further, in discussing education and treatment, he avoided the term *case manager* because "no one wants to be a 'case,' and no one wants to be 'managed'" (p. 214).

Stemming largely from Hobbs's work, staff in schools and programs that adopt the ecological perspective prefer to use the language used for most children, the least stigmatizing terms available. When forced to use the more pathology-based terms often required to meet bureaucratic demands, Re-ED staff do so only of necessity; staff often will use the mandated terms in formal reports but will avoid them when talking about the children or making decisions on their behalf.

Learning occurs in the context of well-planned, purposeful and meaningful days—one day successfully accomplished after another.

The goal of a Re-ED school is to plan for each day in the life of a child to be full and purposeful. Meeting this goal poses a constant challenge to teacher-counselors and other program staff. The task is indeed challenging:

> [T]o design a daily program so engaging, so varied and new yet orderly and stable, . . . so filled with success in matters large and small, so unconcerned with failure, so appreciative of individuality and of common purpose, so evocative of a sense of community, so finely modulated to the needs of a particular child and a particular moment, . . . so filled with good talk, so fatiguing, so rewarding to children and teacher-counselors alike . . . that the disturbed child finds himself immediately committed to a new way of living at once more satisfying to himself and more satisfactory to the people in his life. (Hobbs, 1982, p. 89)

For each day to be full and purposeful requires commitment, resources, and careful planning—planning by administrators well

in advance, by teacher-counselors, and with involvement of students themselves. When these days do occur, it is difficult for a child to behave in the nonadaptive ways that led to being described as "disturbed." On a good day in a Re-ED school or classroom, a visitor may wonder why these children are in a special class.

> *Visitor. A board member visiting a Re-ED school:* Why are these kids here? They're so involved. The place is more orderly and calmer than my child's high school.

On a bad day, staff support each other as best they can. At the end of the day, they "debrief," examine what went wrong and how it might have gone better, whether the problems that occurred call for sticking with previous plans or for reconsideration of a child's plan, and who else may be able to help if they have come to the end of their ideas or understanding. Re-ED staff are well aware that not all days can or will go well, but they work diligently to make them all go well.

Learning of all kinds is important; new skills encourage a child to create a better life for himself or herself.

In any Re-Ed school, numerous learning activities are included; often academic skills are taught in the context of a nonacademic activity or the group's planning for a nonacademic activity. For example, camping and nature-based exploration have been a part of Re-ED from the beginning, largely inspired by Loughmiller's (1965, 1979) work. The belief is that the outdoors can give children and youth new opportunities to learn about themselves, their peers, and the skills they will need to live in the adult world. Re-ED staff often have seen how basic the relationships of behavior to their consequences are in the outdoors and how obvious are the mutual dependencies of group members in these settings. Experience has shown that adding ropes courses, canoeing, or rappelling fosters not only physical development but also confidence in one's own capabilities. Ecologically speaking, these nonschool skills have important translations into children's worlds. New skills help replace discordant relationships (e.g., negative peer groups in the community) with healthy substitutes (e.g., membership in a scout troop).

Child. Knowing he was viewed in the community as a "menace," Manny had an exciting story to tell staff: Last weekend I saw Mr. Cole next door and his son Jim trying to set up their new tent. They must have tried for 30 minutes before I had the nerve to ask them if I could help. Mr. Cole said, "No!" real loud, and they kept on trying for another hour. I offered to help twice more before Mr. Cole finally said OK. So I helped 'em get it set up and showed them how it was like our tents at school. Mr. Cole was pretty nice then. And last night he even asked me to go camping with him and Jim!!

Not all therapeutic agents are professionals; important ones are already in the child's life.

The natural agents in an ecosystem include most centrally parents, teachers, relatives, family friends, and often professionals in community agencies. Viewed together, these persons are the coplanners and implementers of treatment and intervention, given the support needed for success. From an ecological perspective, "parents are no longer viewed as sources of contagion, but as responsible collaborators in making the system work" (Hobbs, 1982, p. 28). Where ecosystem members carry out planned changes, they not only learn but also discover new, more productive transactions with the child. Parents and caretakers are not simply "involved" in Re-ED settings; they are active participants in each phase of planning and intervention for their child. They are also encouraged to participate as

- Members of parent support groups, gaining from and giving help to other parents.
- Representatives on parent advisory groups, contributing to design and review of the school's mission, goals, process decisions, and outcome reports.
- Family in staff roles, which increases new parents' opportunities for contact with those who have seen some success, as well as known the pain.
- Trustees or board members, who maintain the ultimate responsibility for the program's continuing operation and continual improvement.

The goal is not a perfect world for the child, but a satisfactory one where successful days are more common than not and the ecosystem can function without massive professional help.

In embracing an ecological perspective and rejecting the designation of the child as "ill," we abandon cure as a goal. Instead, we seek to help all the members of the child's world to learn how to function in a reasonably satisfactory manner. We become a part of that system only until it appears likely that the system will continue to work successfully without us. This may mean significant improvement in one component or smaller improvements in a number of other components that comprise a child's world. Improvements flow from "successful days," when each child (and family or community member) comes as close as possible to mastery of the day and have hope for success tomorrow.

> *Mother. Near the end of her time at the Early Intervention Center with her preschooler:* Things aren't perfect—and maybe they never will be, but I feel we're in control now—90% of the time, and the other 10% we're working on.

Achieving these ends is the product of systematic ecological analysis and intervention planning.

Hobbs (1982) termed what teacher-counselors do as "precision programming" and outlined its sequence as:

> (1) shared identification and definition of a problem; (2) agreement on means to effect desired changes; (3) specification of outcomes sought, preferably in behaviors that can be counted, measured, or consensually validated; (4) assignment and acceptance of responsibilities for carrying out the plan by specified target dates; and (5) periodic evaluation of progress and redefinition of the problem—in a continuing cycle. (p. 87)

Hobbs stressed the importance of communication among the persons involved, so that goals, means, and desired outcomes are shared and can be achieved. From this perspective, intervention is best planned within the context of the purposeful day, planned with

natural agents, and eventually carried out largely by them. It follows that empowering families requires imparting problem-solving skills "to one or more adults who are important in the life of a child, and to the adolescent when old enough and competent, so that the ecosystem can function effectively and meet new crises without external assistance" (p. 214).

The best interventions build on ecosystem strengths and commit to positive goals and strategies.

Drawing upon an ecological perspective, we believe that positive change can occur, which motivates us to program for it. Examining the potential sources of strength in the child and others in the child's world (even within negative episodes) leads us to develop interventions that otherwise might be overlooked. For instance, the child who leads a group in engaging in an antisocial act possesses both leadership skills and aspirations that could be channeled elsewhere. The parent who precipitates verbal battles with an adolescent about curfew violations is concerned about the youth's whereabouts and is likely to be willing to engage in the surveillance needed by parents. The teacher who expresses frustration with her failed efforts to help a child reveals that she has no other options but may be receptive to new ones, given models, support, and encouragement. Important helper strength in the education and treatment process lies in decoding, reframing, and pulling out the dormant potential and searching for strengths where some might see only weaknesses.

In brief, we see our children (and their families) as learners, like the rest of us.

We plan carefully for purposeful days with meaning to students and encourage them to explore new skill areas. We develop plans with family members to build new competencies and achieve purposeful days for them all. We use a systematic approach and encourage them to use it for themselves. And we look for potential strengths, even in unlikely places. Each of these intervention preferences and design strategies is translatable to public school settings. Ideally, the strategies would be employed in all the natural settings of children and youth and their families, promoting prevention and early intervention before difficulties become less malleable.

5 Incorporating Elements of Other Perspectives into an Ecological Approach

Although conceptually rich, the ecological approach is an incomplete model; that is, it lacks specific interventions to meet various goals set for ecosystem members. This flexibility is intentional, since specified and validated interventions have long been rare in our field. The open nature of the ecological approach allows us to incorporate the most functional components of other perspectives. The ecological repertoire has expanded over time with the addition, adaptation, and creation of many techniques and strategies such as those outlined in the following sections.

Skill Instruction Advances

Advances in instructional techniques and learning theory have always been important to Re-ED and other ecologically oriented schools and programs. For example, the principles and techniques of programmed instruction significantly influenced academic development in the early Re-ED schools. Specification of student entry and

target skills, the breakdown of intervening skill steps into accomplishable learning chunks, and prompting and fading techniques provided templates for conducting instruction across the wide range of skill targets set for children and other ecosystem members.

Re-ED schools plan activities in many natural and community settings, situations in which teachable moments abound. Staff frequently seize opportunities for learning in nonacademic settings and plan for application of classroom learning in nonclass settings. So-called enterprise units are complex activities that capitalize on a group's interests, using all of its opportunities for skill building. Often these units involve selling or sharing products with others who need them.

> *Child.* I saw some more pictures on TV of those poor people in Mexico after that hurricane, Mr. V. It made me feel good to think of the Sloppy Joes we're making to sell for lunches so we can send the money to help them down there.

Active instruction is a natural affiliate of the Re-ED philosophy. Hunter's (1982) organized insights from learning theory and research have proven useful to staff in building instructional skills. Most recently, the tenets, principles, and techniques of brain-friendly learning are attracting interest as well (e.g., Jensen, 1998).

Psychoeducational Concepts and Techniques

Psychoeducational intervention strategies and theoretical components were incorporated into early Re-ED programs. Many strategies proposed by the early developers of psychoeducational views were adopted or adapted (Long, Morse, & Newman, 1996; Redl & Wineman, 1957). Long's conceptualization of the conflict cycle (Long, Morse, & Newman, 1996) is of particular importance; many family members and teachers have gained insight from his explanation of how adults react to children's behavior in ways that cre-

ate control struggles and accelerate conflict. Long's conflict cycle paradigm is unique in that it highlights the role adults can accidentally play in fueling a crisis if they are unaware of the dynamics of the student's behavior. It is the student's perceptions, thoughts, and subsequent feelings that result in behavior, yet too often we address only the observable outcomes. Students can become mired in rigid patterns that lead to self-fulfilling prophecies acted out time and again with adults who want to help, but find themselves drawn into the student's drama. The development of the Life Space Interview into Life Space Crisis Intervention (LSCI) (Wood & Long, 1991) identifies six specific patterns of such rigid patterns of perceiving, thinking, feeling, and behaving. Advanced LSCI training (Long & Fecser, 1997) offers staff specific techniques for diagnosing and responding to students in a way that decelerates conflict, builds trust, and helps students select alternatives to acting out. LSCI uses crisis as an opportunity for staff to develop insight and understanding while building a new awareness of their role in conflicts.

Another psychoeducational approach that has been incorporated in Re-ED programs is Wood's (1996) Developmental Teaching/Developmental Therapy curricular model, which provides five social-emotional stages of development based on major theories from developmental psychology. These stages laid the groundwork for curricular principles for students at different stages. An associated instrument, the Developmental Teaching Objectives Rating Form-Revised (DTORF-R, Wood, 1992), is used to assess the stages of child functioning in four domains: Behavior, Socialization, Communication, and Academics/Cognition. The measure has high relevance for establishing skill instructional targets as the child progresses from stage to stage. A particularly useful conceptual element is Wood's delineation of different expectations children hold for adults at different social-emotional stages. According to Wood (1996), many adult–child interactions may be counterproductive because the adult's expectations and behavior reflect those needed by children in a developmental stage different from the child's current one.

Group Process Theory and Tools

Group development through use of group process techniques has long been a valued part of ecological programming. The work of Loughmiller (1965, 1979) and others (Vorrath & Brendtro, 1985) contributed to many common Re-ED practices. *Group cohesion* refers to the degree of attraction that a group has for its members (Shaw, 1981). In reviewing the literature, Valore (1991) found that highly cohesive groups engage in more social interactions, engage in more positive interactions, exert greater influence over members, are more effective in achieving goals, and have higher member satisfaction than less cohesive groups. Valore's research on group cohesion in Re-ED classrooms led to an operational definition by means of a valid and reliable observation instrument assessing cohesion. The study yielded the following significant results: (a) highly cohesive groups have greater resistance to disruption; (b) highly cohesive groups successfully graduate more students to less restrictive settings; and (c) less cohesive groups have more students who leave the program unsuccessfully.

Developing peer-directed cohesive groups is a primary goal of ecologically oriented classrooms. A primary strategy for working toward group cohesion is incorporating classroom meetings into the daily schedule, providing children opportunities to develop communication, positive interaction, and the intellectual skills that contribute to emotional growth and behavior change. Valore (1991) listed the following 14 basic elements of a group meeting:

1. A teacher-counselor (TC) announces the meeting and brings the group to a point of order.
2. A leader is designated (if the group has progressed to the point where leaders are developed within the group).
3. The group assembles in a circle.
4. All TCs sit with the group and participate fully.
5. The TCs sit apart from each other.
6. TCs/members praise appropriate movement to the meeting area.

7. The members review the group rules.
8. The agenda is discussed (with content dependent on the type of meeting).
9. TCs/members use verbal reinforcement for good meeting behavior, use of group values, constructive feedback, and other important contributions.
10. TCs use the techniques of active listening.
11. TCs encourage member-to-member interaction ("Say it to . . .").
12. TCs/members address the feelings of individuals.
13. TCs/members address the feelings of the group.
14. Expectations are set for the transition to the next activity.

Valore also provided a guide/observation form for four kinds of meetings: planning meetings, positive feedback meetings, problem-solving meetings, and goal meetings. Working with children in groups is a major socialization intervention with troubled youth.

Behavioral Strategies

The ecological approach's early and continuing emphasis on competence and learning made social learning theory a valued resource, particularly the work of Patterson, DeBaryshe, and Ramsey (1989). Operant behavioral techniques appearing in the mid 1960s were introduced to Re-ED by Bricker and Bricker, who taught the strategies directly to teachers and parents, including a mother whose child was diagnosed with autism. Operant theory helped Re-ED staff to provide the structures needed by many students to be more successful both in school and at home (Walker & Buckley, 1972).

Biases for Strategy Selection

From the beginning of their use in Re-ED programs, staff have placed emphasis on behavior modification strategies that include the most mature reinforcers effective for a child or youth. Emphasis is on how adults and peers use their potential as social reinforcers.

One teacher-counselor said, "My experience has been extended further by the influence of a theoretical frame of reference in behavior modification. I do not refer strictly to the laboratory use of learning theory but rather to a concerted effort to identify and utilize effectively those reinforcers . . . that are present and available in our regular daily activities" (Hobbs, 1982, p. 114). Staff in Re-ED schools and programs maintain strong biases toward behavioral contingency planning—skill building and antecedent-level interventions are top choices. When possible, staff prefer to use consequences that are positive rather than negative, intrinsic more than extrinsic, activities more than things, proactive more than reactive, logical rather than unrelated, natural more than contrived, group rather than individual, and implemented by ecosystem members rather than by outside professionals.

Behavioral theory and methods have contributed to the use of data in Re-ED programs. Staff want to make data-based decisions when they can, rather than relying on their subjective impressions that "things are better." For these reasons, various forms of data collection and review are common in Re-ED settings.

Key Behaviors, or Finding a Place to Start

Patterson and colleagues' (1989) concept of key operants and the logjam analogy they used to explain it are highly useful in ecological programming. In an ecosystem in which problems are varied and complex, we can be overwhelmed in our attempts to find a place to start. In any logjam, however, there are key logs that, if moved, have the capacity to move other logs downstream. The challenge facing Re-ED staff is to identify the key logs; determine which ones can be reached first; and plan for successive actions to move the key logs, then others, downstream. We look at the complex nature of the problems to be addressed and ask which ones are pivotal, serving as the key logs or key operants. We then ask which of those key logs (operants) we can address first with the available resources (often the strengths present in the ecosystem's members). The answers to these questions lead to a stepwise plan of action that is far less complicated than if we attempted to handle the logjam on a more global basis.

Managing Classroom Behavior

Behavioral techniques often help to increase positive predictability in the lives of children. Jones (n.d.) described the basic classroom management techniques used by Re-ED staff over the years. He started with the bottom line: "It is usually impossible to make anyone do anything if they do not want to do it" (p. 3). Jones then gave classroom examples for using basic techniques to help students do what they need (but likely do not want) to do: Premack scheduling, routines, rules, recognition, limit setting, and combinations of these techniques. For example, Jones described the routine used to get students off to a good start with every activity "starting from a point of order." Every activity begins with "30 quiet seconds" (more or less can be named). Jones suggested the following sequence:

1. Call for a quiet time.
2. Turn off the lights.
3. Immediately recognize by name the students who begin to get quiet, using a quiet voice.
4. Glance at the clock to determine whether 30 quiet seconds have passed, and say "Time starts over" if the group has not quieted down.
5. Turn on the lights after 30 quiet seconds.
6. State the time and ask what the schedule says comes next.
7. Call on a student with a "quiet hand" up.
8. Describe the next activity.

This routine sets the stage for moving on to what comes next, if the teacher's behavior has been upbeat and positive throughout. One factor that makes this strategy work is the students' anticipation of interesting activities occurring at points during the schedule. According to Jones,

> Students in general, and emotionally disturbed students in particular, test rules . . . to see if you will do what you say you will do. There is more to effective limit setting than being consistent; rules should be enforced in a *nonpunitive* manner. . . in such a

> way that the student understands that enforcement is for his benefit, rather than your benefit. It includes voice tone (firm, but not aggressive), . . . facial expression (understanding, but firm). . . . It includes the ability to hide your frustration, even when you are extremely frustrated. It is an ability to communicate to a student that you are in charge . . . . You are going to accept the child, but not his behavior . . . . You demonstrate that you know what you are doing. (p. 11)

Jones pointed out that there is a difference between a message that states an open challenge (I am the teacher, and you will do what I say or else) and one that communicates both the teacher's self-control and caring (I care enough about you to enforce the rule). "Limit setting means having appropriate rules, having specific expectations for students and holding them to those expectations, enforcing expectations in a manner that is not vindictive or punitive, all while maintaining the student's dignity . . . and more" (p. 27). Jones suggested some techniques for teachers to monitor their own communication of both empathy and high expectations by recording their own and their students' behavior. The criterial target is a student compliance rate near 80% of observed behaviors. If we do not reach that rate, it is time to examine our own behavior. "When we do not get the desired response from students, it is too easy to blame them. Statements such as 'He does not belong here,' 'She's too severe for the program,' or 'My class is more difficult than yours,' reflect the failure to accept responsibility for behavior management" (p. 32).

Cognitive Behavioral Techniques

Kelly (1955) laid the groundwork for cognitive techniques with his psychology of personal constructs. Kelly proposed that people develop sets of conceptual templates that help them to relate new experiences to previous ones and make predictions about the likely outcomes. Kelly saw many psychological problems as products of erroneous (or nonfunctional) construct systems through which the person filters experience and then acts. The Re-ED belief that children

and youth can be taught cognitive control made cognitive behavior modification a useful program addition (Meichenbaum, 1977).

As we mentioned earlier, Long and his colleagues' (1996) conflict cycle sees the child's (or adult's) view of the world as setting the stage for their emotional reactions to events and subsequent behavior. A frequently omitted step in the assessment process is determining what the child believes about the world, how it works, who the child is, and what others do to or for him or her. We can better understand how and why problem behavior is functional for a child or youth if we understand the youngster's basic assumptions and where they come from. Once a child develops assumptions about the world, he or she interprets events through the filter of those assumptions. Those interpretations serve to verify the child's views and strengthen the assumptions he or she already holds, which maintains the cycle.

Interventions can be structured to introduce so-called manageable doubt—cognitive dissonance about the accuracy of those assumptions—while teaching the youngster more productive alternatives for behavior. We begin by asking questions that might introduce to an individual or group the possibility of a different interpretation, perhaps reframing the event in a different light. In reverse role plays, children or adults play others' parts and then talk about what they thought and felt as the other. We may specifically teach children to use "self-talk"—messages to themselves that help children and adults to see people and events differently. Nichols's (1999) Clear Thinking curriculum stresses understanding and gaining control of our feelings, thoughts, and subsequent behavior.

Social Skills and Problem-Solving Curricula

Social skills curricula, such as those developed by Goldstein (1988) and Walker, Todis, Holmes, and Horton (1988), are used in Re-ED programs. They are incorporated within the larger context of problem solving, using a standard format such as the one that follows,

which children can learn relatively quickly and apply in almost any setting:

1. Stop and think before you act! (Interrupt your reaction to the event.)
2. What's the problem? (Identify what is really going on.)
3. What can I do? (Explore options and where each one leads.)
4. Do it right! (Make a good choice and act on it.)
5. Congratulate yourself. (Evaluate results and pat yourself on the back for trying.)

> *Child. Louis was concerned that the group home's teaching parent would be angry as he returned the messed up audiotape he had borrowed. He approached the adult with the tape behind his back, saying:* Now, Mr. Ward, I've got to show you something, but I want you to remember the problem-solving steps. Stop and think before you act.

In that teaching problem solving to individuals and groups is a time-honored ecological strategy, many Re-ED programs rely on the curriculum developed by Bash and Camp (1985). Experience has shown that a generic format with five to seven standard points works well to teach skills that generalize over time. Re-ED staff find that the skill steps in social skills curricula or anger management instructional programs (e.g., Goldstein, 1988) are helpful as resources to fill out the details for specific problem situations. Practice role plays using the steps from a curriculum can be incorporated into any meeting convened to address an event occurring in another setting. The detailed structure provided by these curricula is especially useful to staff who have limited planning time. Practice of the skills is extended to home (using homework assignments on Social Skills Report Cards) or in contrived simulations set up in the community (e.g., recruiting a local business person to hold a mock personnel feedback session with a student who hears positive and negative employee behavior discussed).

We understand that some children can learn a new anger management skill, make the right choice in role plays, and still fail in a real-

life situation. Staff are tempted to see such behavior as manipulative; "He can do it if he really wants to." However, we now know that children from abusive situations downshift into the limbic system and even the midbrain faster than those from nonabusive backgrounds (Perry, 1997). The human brain makes no distinction between physically and psychologically threatening stressors. When these children are psychologically threatened by an event, they "downshift" and act out their emotions, often in unacceptable ways. Cognitive social skill instruction requires thinking, use of the brain's cortex. If limbic system activity is pre-empting the cortex's engagement, the child cannot at that moment use learned cognitive skills. The situation resembles our automatic, self-protective behavior when a bus approaches us at high speed as we cross the street. But for children, a psychological stressor as simple as a teacher's direction can trigger downshifting into fight rather than flight.

To help make social skills instruction effective, we must introduce rehearsal. Over the course of evolution, the brain has become efficient in using working memory by developing automaticity for behaviors rehearsed repeatedly. When we drive our cars to work on routes we regularly use, we can be preoccupied with other thoughts and arrive at work without accident or memory of the journey. Through greatly increased practice rates of social skills, the child no longer needs to think about the steps. The number of rehearsal sessions required differs for each child. The need for numerous rehearsal sessions underscores the importance attached to the skills we choose and the choices of basic strategies that begin with "stop and think."

Psychoactive Medication

Although gaining and maintaining the physical health of students has always been a high priority in ecological intervention, the use of psychoactive medication was for many years strongly avoided whenever possible. This stance was largely the result of two factors. First, until recently, medications were so imprecise as to approximate cannon fire at a small target. Negative side effects were numerous and

often competed with therapeutic activities. In particular, side effects often interfered with the learning experiences that were critical components of ecological programming. Second, students often attributed their behavioral gains to the medication rather than to increased self-control, and staff often observed this same attribution being made by adults in the child's world. However, more highly targeted psychoactive medications now make their use less damaging and more helpful. Finally, increased knowledge about neurologically driven disorders—such as Tourette's syndrome—has led to targeted medical interventions that may be lifelong requirements for some individuals.

In Re-ED programs, medication is still avoided if possible, and it is always used in conjunction with other interventions (Forness, Sweeney, & Toy, 1996). Psychiatrists in Re-ED programs make careful decisions based on specific knowledge about the range of available drugs. If medication is prescribed, staff and parents carefully monitor both medication effects and their choice of words regarding the medication when speaking to children. Students are told that the medication may help them to be more ready to work toward their goals, but that it cannot do the work for them; in the end, they are still responsible for the behavior required to learn and grow. Missing medication is never tied to a behavioral incident, even if the adult suspects the two events may be related.

> *Staff. After a child named his missed medication as the reason for not staying in his seat.* I know you missed your medication this morning, Bert, but you know it only helps you—it doesn't put you in your seat and chain you to the chair [said with a grin]. So let's go back and sit down. I bet you can still finish your work before we go to gym.

Trauma and Emotional Whiplash

Use of behavioral interventions often may fail because of the assumption that people are more cognitive than their emotions allow. Brain research has demonstrated that when the emotional centers are firing, the logical centers are not engaged (Jensen,

1998). Perry's (1997) research suggests that early trauma has massive effects on children, leaving them hypervigilant, watching anxiously for repeated harm or disassociating as escape. Since many U.S. children know violence, we understand that hypervigilant children are unable to focus on the task at hand for fear of harm.

According to Perry (1997), "Children exposed to violence benefit from the presence of a stable adult, even outside the home" (pp. 143–144). Perry (1994) offered some basic principles for working with traumatized children:

1. Provide a consistent, predictable pattern for the day.
2. Nurture and comfort, but only in appropriate ways and contexts.
3. Give the child choices to make and some sense of control.
4. Talk with the child—discuss your behavioral expectations and discipline style, give age-appropriate information, and do not avoid talking about the child's trauma.
5. Protect the child by allowing exit from an upsetting activity.
6. Watch for signs of reenactment, avoidance, or hyperreactivity; then be tolerant and try to comfort when they occur.

A Curriculum for Caring

The lessons provided by cultures closer to nature have come to be especially important to us, particularly as expressed by Brendtro and colleagues (1990) and shared in their Black Hills Seminars. Brendtro and his colleagues refer to the need for children and youth to learn caring and empathy through activities in which they help others. Re-ED programs have long favored activities in which individuals and groups help others who need them. For example, older students tutor younger students in lower-level skills, even if the tutor's own skills are below those of most of his or her age-mates. Groups of students develop service projects such as making regular visits to nursing homes to play games with residents or growing

vegetables to deliver to a homeless shelter. These altruistic acts can transfer the helping roles of students from a Re-ED setting into their homes and communities. Positive relationships that stem from these planned helping experiences can go with youngsters when they leave, helping them feel worthwhile. Some Re-ED schools include an individual service project in their criteria for "graduation" and transition of students back to public school.

The Result: An Expanded Ecological Perspective

As our field and its literature grow, we gain new tools for ecological change and the perspective itself enlarges. We see more clearly the major impact on human transactions made by biogenic factors, both those of the child and those of others in the child's world. Medical professionals work on the ecological team. We see the impact of cognitive beliefs and strategies on the behavior of ecosystem members, and we introduce options for more satisfying thoughts and actions. We see the impact of past learning on current behavior and discover new ways to teach students to be successful. We work to understand the contributions of culture to ecosystem harmony and discord and strive to be more culturally knowledgeable and responsive. We look at the developmental nature of learning to care about others, and we help our children and youth perform caring acts.

6

Useful Templates to Clarify the Re-ED Perspective

The writings of Hobbs have given conceptual recognition to many whose work served as precursors of the ecological perspective. Bridging gaps between theory and practice, however, requires templates, either cognitive or visual, that assist or guide ecological analysis and planning where ecosystems are in difficulty. Some of the most commonly used are described in the following sections.

Ecosystem Maps and Diagrams

Visual depictions of ecosystems can summarize a great deal of information in an efficient package. Ecological maps (Cantrell & Cantrell, 1985) frequently are used. A series of Venn diagrams (overlapping circles) are drawn with the child circle in the center to show the child as the defining member of this ecosystem. The overlaps between the other settings and the child's circle demonstrate what the child has learned to feel, think, and do from his or her experiences in that setting. Strengths can be represented by stars placed on the map where they best show whether this strength belongs primarily to the child, to another member, or in their inter-

action. Problems and needs are designated by Xs in much the same way.

Hobbs (1982) used a diagram to depict a child's ecosystem and to reflect the fluidity of the system by representing each relevant ecosystem individual as a circle within an irregularly shaped environmental boundary. The child's circle is at the center, and his or her age is included because that is critical information. Typically, maps and diagrams show the increasing complexity of a youngster's ecology as he or she grows older. Once analysis is complete and interventions are planned for logjam difficulties, we find it helpful to name those interventions in boxes written under the problems they target or the strengths they employ.

Ecological Analysis and Enablement Plans

The product of ecological assessment and intervention planning was an individual plan devised for (and with) the child, family, teacher, and other central ecosystem members. Hobbs (1982) presented the major components of a one-page plan with eight columns. The first column lists each service required; the remaining columns answer seven questions for each service. Who is responsible (for initiating and monitoring the service)? By whom (will the service be provided)? By what date? At what cost? Source of funds? Criterion (for success of service)? Follow-up (requirements)? The plan is brief, clear, and simple; it also provides an easy reminder for all ecosystem members of their goals and their responsibilities.

The Heuristic

Ecological assessment and planning is a simple process only with the most simple of ecosystems. Generally, simple problems never reach the point of referral to special classes or special programs serving children with so-called severe emotional disorders. The complexity of the process for helping complex ecosystems is difficult to

learn quickly. The process involves stagewise intervention, for which hundreds of pieces of information must be sought, found, and organized into the patterns that make sense and can then be addressed. The heuristic is a detailed guide to ecological assessment and problem solving, developed to shortcut the training process involved before individuals can become effective and efficient ecological problem solvers. The term heuristic was borrowed from computer programmers and chosen because its dictionary definition approximated the description of its "best guess" nature. The guide included questions asking people to identify current functioning, set goals for change, and plan steps for stagewise approximations. Cantrell and Cantrell (1980) demonstrated that when ecologically oriented school support teachers followed the heuristic guide for ecological assessment and planning, and did so completely and in sequence, they met more objectives in significantly less time than with their own cases when they did not plan completely before intervening. This finding held true regardless of difficulty level or who performed the assessment. A copy of the heuristic and a completed model are available from the authors.

In our attempt to perform as responsible professionals, we are constantly reminded that it is the lives of real children, real family members, and real school staff that we are part of—even though temporarily so. Applying what we learn in our professional training to these real lives is not always easy. In the following section, we summarize the process of ecological assessment and intervention, showing how it worked with one child, family, and school.

A Youth's Story, Seen Through an Outline for Ecological Assessment and Planning

A. Introducing the Child

1. Who is the child? How old is the child? Where and with whom does the child live and go to school?
   Jerome is a 17-year-old African-American male who lives with his mother. He attends a Re-ED program after having been chronically truant from regular school.

2. What does the child enjoy doing?
   Jerome enjoys listening to music, writing, and playing basketball one on one. He would like to have a job so he could have more CDs and nice clothes.

3. What does the child do well?
   He is an astute observer of the human condition, especially as it performs its slow, often violent dance around the impoverished area of the city that Jerome calls home. Jerome has the ability to capture the pathos and humor encased within the neighborhood characters he visits with daily and to express those feelings in free-verse poetry.

4. Who is important to the child?
   Jerome's mother is the most important person in his life; no one else has as close an impact on him, even though his behaviors worry his mother greatly.

5. Who else fills, or could fill, a special need for the child and family?
   Staff at the Re-ED school try to reach into Jerome's world and hope to open up the outside world to him. His mother keeps in close contact with the school; they continually share their observations about how Jerome is doing in the program.

B. Assessing the Discord

1. What are the central areas of discord? What specifically does the child do or not do that is problematic?
   Jerome has a history of serious truancy. This interfered with his regular school performance, although he is capable of achieving at grade level. Jerome has frequent "down" days when he hides behind a pair of yellow-lensed ski goggles, his ears plugged into a CD player, his body wrapped in a heavy coat, even in balmy weather. Although he withdraws from his classmates, Jerome feels most secure when viewed as the leader in class and on the basketball court. Whenever another student challenges his leadership he becomes aggressive. He has great difficulty opening up to staff or assuming other roles when his aggression turns off his classmates. His behav-

ior interferes with his attaining and/or maintaining his desired leadership position with his classmates.

2. Where, when, and how frequently does the child do it?
   Jerome's difficulties are expressed primarily in the classroom. He arrives at school brandishing his street-savvy survival persona in ways that challenge his teachers' authority over the classroom and threaten his classmates. This kind of behavior occurs about two to three times per week, if he is not truant.

3. How do others react? What appears to be maintaining this problematic behavior?
   At school, Jerome's teachers have tried to "cut him some slack," often leaving him to his solitary ruminations in his preferred back-of-the-class seat. His noninvolvement sometimes appears to be maintained by transactions in the classroom. His teachers avoid his sudden shifts from passive-aggressive to overtly aggressive behaviors by making reduced demands on him for classroom-relevant behaviors. He rewards them by reducing his aversiveness and refraining from antagonizing his classmates; instead, he sits quietly with his music and writes in his journal. This arrangement is so stable that Jerome has slowed his rate of academic progress significantly over the past few months.

C. Planning the Intervention

1. How can we change the situation (antecedents) to encourage more productive behavior?
   One of the school staff who was an English literature major in college and who has published some essays locally has agreed to tutor Jerome with his writing. Tutoring sessions can only occur if Jerome is at school and he has made teacher-prescribed progress in his academics prior to the tutoring sessions. Jerome will be in the next wave of students enrolled in the Re-ED center's Transition from School to Work program.

2. What adaptive behavior(s), competing with the problem, would we like to encourage?

Adaptive behaviors include attending school regularly, leaving his street-survival behaviors outside the center in the morning, and tackling the academic tasks he has avoided for many months but needs to complete in order to graduate.

3. What can be used to strengthen the adaptive behavior?
   Jerome's mother has the most success with Jerome by avoiding direct confrontations with him, which he tends to view as "disrespecting" him. Staff have developed the same respectful relationship with him, openly recognizing his attempts at maturity, then using these behaviors as gateways to writing assistance and job club sessions.

4. How can we remove the consequences maintaining the problem?
   To deal with his aggressiveness with his peers, we remove the peers when he attempts to assert undue dominance over them. We can reward his productive days by disseminating his writings to staff, posting them in the hallway, and publishing the best of these in the program-wide newsletter. We can reduce the proportion of time he spends withdrawing from classroom activities by injecting many high-interest activities into the school day.

5. How can we feasibly and naturally structure the situation with cues to encourage it?
   Each morning teacher counselors will review with Jerome the growth-oriented behaviors he displayed the preceding day(s) to highlight their importance and remind him of immediate past successes.

6. How can we feasibly and naturally structure consequences to strengthen progress?
   The classroom team will pass the word that he is being productive to support staff and others whom Jerome normally contacts during the day so they can remark favorably on the day's progress. Access to tutoring and job club sessions is related to his meeting behavioral goals. Continuing as group meeting leader for his class and as an active basketball participant will help maintain his active, positive involvement

with school. Daily communication with his mother enables her to support his progress.

7. How will we know when we have met our goal?
   When truancies, aggressive episodes, and "down" days become less frequent (no more than 1 day per week) and academics increase (to 80% of his assignments completed).

8. How can we build in a continuous evaluation system?
   Attendance records, classroom ratings of daily "down" days, and weekly counts of aggressive acts are reviewed by the classroom team at least weekly.

D. Implementing and Monitoring the Plan

1. How will we introduce the plan's changes and set them into motion?
   The plan will be discussed in the teaching team's weekly staffing. Support staff will be advised of how they can informally recognize his positive behaviors. The team will discuss major elements of the changes in his treatment plan with Jerome and his mother.

2. When or at what points will we make evaluation decisions? How will we decide whether the plan should be continued, revised, faded, or discontinued?
   Weekly staffings will be used to monitor and discuss changes that appear to be occurring. Group decisions will be made and implemented at that time.

3. What will we do when we have reached our specified goal?
   Fade to less intensive monitoring. Discussions with Jerome about his progress will focus on what opportunities exist that were unavailable to him previously, such as a job search.

4. How will we exit from the intervention plan?
   Exit will be gradual, fading into the leaner schedule of social support that might be expected in the workaday world.

5. What follow-up procedures will be instituted?
   Staff will monitor his mother's perceptions of his behavior through weekly contacts.

E. Providing Follow-Up Support

1. Are changes being maintained? Is further follow-up necessary?
   If changes are not being maintained, staff will help the mother devise other strategies. While Jerome is still enrolled in the Re-ED program, changes will be made in his program to reflect changing conditions.

2. What really happened?
   Jerome found the immediate money he could earn from the job he obtained too alluring. He dropped out of the Re-ED school before graduating but earned his GED later. He continues to be gainfully employed and has stayed out of trouble on the street.

7 Contributions to Current Thought and Future Possibilities

Many of the biases of the ecological approach are now more commonly accepted by persons serving troubled and troubling children and youth. Often, the same individuals who embrace ecological concepts are unaware that the roots of such concepts were planted and developed by Hobbs and Rhodes and their colleagues and predecessors. The work of the Re-ED schools and that of proponents of the ecological approach are not widely known, despite early recommendations for more widespread replication with troubled and troubling children and youth.

After their visits to Re-ED programs and a careful examination of Re-ED data, the Joint Commission on Mental Health of Children (1970) strongly endorsed the program: "Because of its proven effectiveness, in terms of both cost per child and success in restoring the child to home, school, and community, the commission recommends that the Re-ED model be adopted and extended as one of the many needed kinds of services for emotionally disturbed children (p. 44)."

Research and evaluation of Re-ED schools and programs have been performed, although they have been sparse and not widely disseminated. The most controlled investigation was Weinstein's (1974)

original research on Project Re-ED. After examining numerous variables in the three comparison groups, Weinstein concluded,

> The data which have been presented clearly indicate that the Re-ED intervention leads to positive changes in the attitudes, behavior, and learning of disturbed children . . . . Children initially characterized by Re-ED staff as acting out, for whom impulsivity had been a problem, learned to control their motor behavior when necessary and to spend more time evaluating choices before making them. (pp. 205–208)

Lewis's (1988) later investigation of both child change and other ecological variables in a 6-month follow-up study supported the proposition that residential treatment is most successful when personal change and ecological change occur together.

In 1980, the American Re-Education Association (AREA) was founded by schools and programs that practiced the ecological approach, and its members shared their strategies both with each other and with nonmembers who asked for assistance. Today, AREA has 25 member agencies/schools representing over 3,000 staff and about 60 additional individual members from 16 states (M. Freado, personal communication, April 5, 1999). In addition to those identified with AREA, more schools and programs now function with many of the same assumptions and strategies. Although little has been written about Re-ED aside from Hobbs's (1982) book, many of his early ideas are now accepted in the field as best practice. Some of their impacts follow.

Attention to language and terminology in the field signals increasing awareness that language is important, that definitions and word choices have consequences. We hope the proponents of the ecological approach have added to the kind of awareness that led to use of child-first language and decreased use of pathology-oriented terminology.

Commitment to serving children (and families) in least restrictive settings, seen in Public Law 94-142 (enacted in 1975), remains strong in our field. The belief that children should be served as close to their usual child-rearing settings as possible was an early tenet

of the Re-ED proposal submitted to the National Institutes of Mental Health in 1961. Later, Hobbs (1982) expressed it this way: "[T]he troubled child should be removed the least possible distance from his home, school, and community—in time, in geographical space, and in the psychological texture of the experience provided" (p. 29).

Viewing child-helping units ecologically ultimately serves the best interests of children and families. Groups of individuals who have joined together to accomplish goals on behalf of troubled and troubling children and families form ecosystems themselves. Classrooms, schools, and service programs too must work internally to increase harmony and decrease discord through the enhanced competencies of system members. Fecser's (1996) description of program and staff elements needed to create the helping classroom (or program) provides an overall view of how helping agents can create and maintain healthy and responsive helping entities. He sees each element as necessary in the well-rounded classroom for troubled and troubling students, with each component influencing and influenced by the others.

The necessary foundation is a clear values system. To be helpful, we need a lucid sense of purpose or mission. The values define both our global goals and the guiding principles that will lead us toward them. "Not only must teachers and administrators work from a values base, but the classroom itself should have a system of underlying values that the students understand and accept" (Fecser, 1996, p. 472). Fecser proposes a classroom belief system that is based on the rights of students to feel safe and be protected, on the value of classroom activities, and on the importance of each class member and his or her right to respectful treatment.

Once the foundation is laid, the next level consists of four essential structural features of the classroom. First, data are collected on both student conduct and academic behavior; the data clarify expectations and provide the content for feedback to tell students how they are doing. A system related to the data can be developed to acknowledge student progress by increasing responsibilities and privileges as the child makes gains. Second are the rules, rituals, and routines

that are a time-honored tradition in Re-ED classrooms. Over time, the characteristics of good rules, helpful rituals, and effective routines have been shared from one Re-ED staff member to another. Third, the daily schedule provides the heart of the classroom day, structuring how time will be used with less favored activities always followed by more interesting ones. Fourth, the well-organized classroom has a place for almost every object or activity involved in the classroom day. Organization helps staff and students meet expectations and facilitates activity without confusion.

Classroom climate and group cohesion are the next layer of classroom components. To create the positive, personal, and noncompetitive climate needed by troubled and troubling students, we attend to (a) instructional style, (b) a management style in which the teacher knows students well and personalizes responses to them, (c) group relationship building through guided group meetings that help the group solve problems, and (d) empathic responses to student feelings and needs.

At the center is individual planning, which focuses on each student as an individual with special strengths, characteristics, and needs. According to Fecser (1996),

> Too often educators and therapists start with IEP/ISP objectives in their planning and fail to give adequate attention to the background against which those goals are set . . . . Assessment of academic, ecological, behavioral, and social-emotional needs, and development of objectives and remediation strategies can optimally occur only in an environment that facilitates social-emotional growth . . . . [T]he interaction of systems . . . create[s] a harmonious "whole environment" which considers the "whole child." (p. 481)

Future Possibilities

One recent trend holds promise for the state of the field in education and treatment of children and youth facing the challenges of serious emotional and behavioral disorders. Over the last decade,

professionals in our field have appeared to be moving closer together, less blinded by single approaches and by the individually limited constructs of those approaches than seemed true in the 1960s through the 1980s. We appear to be merging our collective intelligence into a new, more integrated approach where the whole is indeed greater than the sum of its parts.

A model is needed that allows the inclusion of all the basic factors that can create major discord for a child and his or her ecosystem. Perhaps an expanded vision of the ecological approach will serve as an overall model to which other theoretical and practical components contribute critical elements. The approach may be well suited to provide such a shell, given its inherent nature. Ecosystem analysis is individual child and family centered; it is sufficiently flexible to allow for individual intervention planning. An expanded ecological approach could also provide aggregated information to inform policy decisions and serve as a planning framework to meet identified population needs.

One obvious advantage of an integrated model would be its communication value, shared across disparate approaches and programs. It is clear we need a common, shared language, as free of jargon and theory-specific terminology as we can make it. Such language would give us communicative benchmarks, allowing us to use shorthand terms for common repeated instances or combinations. Optimally, this shared terminology would help us communicate more effectively with nonprofessionals, the critical natural members of children's ecosystems.

Conclusion

In closing, we see that the ecological perspective has contributed to current emphases on (a) selecting words carefully as we describe our children and youth and their families, (b) educating and serving them in or as near their homes as possible, and (c) viewing schools and programs as ecosystems that must attend to their own continuing development and health if they are to help children.

The view that critical problems of children and youth with serious emotional and behavioral disorders are expressed in their interactions with others in their homes and communities appears now to be nearing common acceptance in our field. The concepts and intervention methods helpful in building the skills and making the changes needed to improve these discordant interactions come from a variety of sources—some with differing perspectives. Although it is not imminent, the development of a consensual megamodel and a shared language appears finally to be a conceivable and desirable possibility for fields serving children and families. The potential for our children and their futures requires that we move beyond our separations.

A former teacher-counselor gives us a youth's perspective. A week before the graduation of a student who had significant problems and was in the Re-ED program considerably longer than the average, the adult and youth talked.

> In the course of the conversation, he asked me if I made a lot of money. My reply was that it was enough but not a great deal, that teachers didn't get paid as much as some of the other professions. I'll never forget his reply. He told me that I should be satisfied with my job because I was helping to "straighten out" a lot of kids like him, and that should make me feel good. It does, and I suppose that explains what Re-ED is all about.

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Note. *The Troubled and Troubling Child* by Nicholas Hobbs is available in a 1994 second edition from the American Re-Education Association (AREA) by calling 1-800-994-2732. (Web site <http://re-ed.org>).

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